

Cristinel Ioja, *A History of Dogmatics in the Romanian Orthodox Theology. From the Establishment of Communism to the Challenges of Postmodernity*, Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2024, 717 p., ISBN: 978-3-506-79449-9

It must be said at the outset that the author, Rev. Prof. Cristinel Ioja¹, is among the few theologians who has taken, for about 30 years, the condition of a disciple with great seriousness and has researched the works of the Romanian and other Orthodox dogmatists with great accuracy. As the author explains, *A History of Dogmatics in Romanian Orthodox Theology* is an original work designed in three volumes: 1) *A History of Dogmatics in Romanian Orthodox Theology. The Dogmatic Tradition in Ancient and Medieval Romanian Theology*; 2) *A History of Dogmatics in Romanian Orthodox Theology. From the Beginnings of Seminary Theological Education in Romanian to the Establishment of Communism*; 3) *A History of Dogmatics in Romanian Orthodox Theology. From the Establishment of Communism to the Challenges of Postmodernity*.

Only the second volume was published in 2013 by Prouniversitaria Publishing House in Bucharest. The present volume covers a large part of the period which was included in a different form in the work, *Dogmatică și dogmatişti. Prolegomena privind aprofundarea Teologiei Dogmatice în România în a doua jumătate a secolului al XX-lea și începutul secolului al XXI-lea (Dogmatics and Dogmatists. Prolegomena Regarding the Deepening of Dogmatic Theology in Romania in the Second Half of the 20th Century and the Beginning of the 21st Century)*, which initially appeared in Timișoara (2008), then in Iași (2017) (page XIII).

This very important synthesis comprises four parts. The first one is entitled: *Orthodox Dogmatics and the Patristic Tradition in Modernity* and offers a very good perspective on Greek, Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian Orthodox Dogmatics, in the second half of the 20th Century: Aspects, Trends, Representatives. As is well-known, at the first Orthodox Theological Congress, held in Athens in 1936, Rev. Georges Florovsky announced the urgent need to “return to the Holy Fathers” and to liberate the Orthodox Theology from the so-called “Babylonian captivity” of Western theology, concerning the theological terminology, concepts, methodology and theological approach. Rev. Prof. G. Florovsky referred to this captivity by using the term “pseudo-morphosis”, in order to describe the long process of Latinization and Westernization of Russian Orthodox Theology. In

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Athens, as the author underlines, a real paradigm shift was generated a in the Orthodox Dogmatics of the 20th century².

The second part bears the title *Romanian Orthodox Dogmatics and the Patristic Tradition in Modernity* and comprises the following subchapters: *The Communist-Atheist Context of Romania and the Paradox of Renewal; Trends in Orthodox Theological Thinking during the Communist Period: East versus West; Theology versus Spirituality?; Theology and Social Apostolate; Monasticism-Community-Society; Conservatism and Renewal; Doctrine and Social Action; Theologically Assumed and Argued Topics: Peace, Social Justice and Collectivism, Work and Patriotism, Progress; Dogmatics in Two Institutes: Bucharest and Sibiu; Searching the Method in Dogmatics; The Features of Orthodox Dogmatics: Dogmatics and the Scripture Dogmatics and the Fathers, Dogmatics and the Philokalia, Dogmatics and the Liturgy, Dogmatics in the Unity of Dogma-Spirituality-Worship; Directions in Romanian Orthodox Dogmatics; Emphasis in Treatises of Dogmatic Theology; Receptivity and Perspective in Dogmatics; Dogmatics in the Romanian Theological Tradition; Dogmatists at the Congresses of the Faculties of Orthodox Theology; Hermeneutics of Dogmas in Dogmatics: Revelation, Triadology, Christology, Anthropology, Cosmology, Gnoseology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology.*

It is well-known that Communism wherever has been imposed, was intended to be not just an economical alternative but also a religious or pseudo-religious one. The authentic religious manifestations were forced to limit themselves to the private area, and even there – as in Albania – were not allowed. Therefore, an elimination of the religious symbols from the public arena was done in order that the communist state might control both the physical and the spiritual needs of its citizens. The Communist *manifesto* (ideology) presented itself as a new form of religion. Consequently, the prisons and the control over the Church were used to convince people of the “advantages” of the new system. Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, were imprisoned and lived an *ecumenic cohabitation of suffering* or an *ecumenism behind the bars*. Furthermore, a terrible experiment called “re-education” was practiced in many prisons. The main aim of the leading system was to diminish and even prevent any kind of religious manifestation, as it opposed the Marxist ideology. In Romania forty-four prisons and seventy-two forced labor camps were set up specifically for the extermination of opponents of the regime, as well as prisons for children. In these torture places over 3 million

² See *Procès Verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes, publiés par les soins du Président Prof. Hamilcar Alivizatos* (Athens: Pyrsos, 1939), 540 p.; E. Stéphanou, “Le premier Congrès de théologie orthodoxe (Athènes, 29 novembre - 3 décembre 1936),” *Échos d'Orient*, no. 36 (1937): 225-38; Christos Filiotis-Vlachavas, “La théologie orthodoxe grecque, entre retour aux Pères et appel de la modernité,” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 89, no. 4 (2015): 425-42.

Romanians suffered of which 800.000 died. When asked about those sentenced to prison for political reasons, Ana Pauker, foreign minister (1945-1952) replied that they did not kill them because she wanted to establish terror in the country: “Simple death would be too good and too easy, it would not frighten the others enough!”³. Nearly 3000 priests were investigated, convicted and served sentences ranging from five years to 25 years of hard labor or even more, transferred to camps in the USSR at the request of the “Big Brother”. 1700 of the arrested and convicted priests belonged to the Orthodox Church; more than 500 priests have died in Romanian political prisons.

As the author underlines, in the second half of the 20th century, in Romania was imposed the communist regime, “triggering a vast movement to adapt all social and cultural segments to the new ideals imposed by the model of the *new man* and the *materialist-atheist doctrine*, professed in the name of peace, progress, and brotherhood between nations” (page 19). In 1948, Patriarch Justinian expressed the duty of the Church to the clergy, being aware that the struggle against atheist totalitarianism would be a long one, even if some expected the Americans to come soon. Romania’s new political framework required the non-interference of the Church in state matters and an unequivocal acceptance of state interference in the Church’s vision of the world and society (page 19).

In these difficult conditions, with strict surveillance, arrests and threats, two theological institutes (Bucharest and Sibiu) and six seminaries managed to function. Publications were censored, practically just the magazines of the eparchial centers appeared, and only after 1970 some books written by theology professors. However, “the Orthodox doctrine was not changed by communist theories or Marxist ideologies”, “although subject to a pressing historical context, theology has remained untouched at its core and has been renewed” (page 23) by the large number of studies in connection with all the chapters of Dogmatics and the other theological disciplines, published in the magazines of the eparchial centers. The most important representative is Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993)⁴, himself suffering 5 years of hard imprisonment. In that period, an important role was also played by Rev Prof. Ion Bria who published abroad, being employed by the World Council of Churches (1974-1995).

³ Principesa Ileana a României, *Trăiesc din nou* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010), 290.

⁴ His *Dogmatic Theology* was published in English in several volumes: Volume 1: *The Experience of God – Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press); Volume 2: *Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God* (Brookline, 2005); Volume 3: *The World – Creation and Deification* (Brookline, 2005); Volume 4: *The Person of Jesus Christ as God and Savior* (Brookline, 2011); Volume 5: *The Church – Communion in the Holy Spirit* (Brookline, 2012); Volume 6: *The Sanctifying Mysteries* (Brookline, 2012); Volume 7: *The Fulfillment of Creation* (Brookline, 2013); for other English translations from his works see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dumitru_St%C4%83niloae.

The third part is entitled *Romanian Orthodox Dogmatics and the Ecumenical Movement* and includes: *Romanian Orthodox Dogmatists in the Ecumenical Movement: General Assemblies, Pan-Orthodox Conferences, Faith and Order Conferences, In Dialogue, Local Ecumenism: Premises, Goals, Convergences; Ecumenical Priorities in the Orthodox Debate: A Holy and Great Orthodox Synod, Reception of Symbolic Texts; The Unique Orthodox Confession of Faith, The Unique Dogmatics of Christianity; Ecumenical Issues from a Dogmatic Perspective: Christian Unity, The Content of Faith and Intercommunion, The Branch Theory, The Limits of the Church, Theology of Service; Dogmatic Topics in Ecumenical Debate: Triadology, Christology, Ecclesiology; Emphasis in the Theological Methods in the Ecumenical Movement; The Methods of Romanian Orthodox Theology in the Ecumenical Movement; Did Apologetics Exist in Communism?*

In the Orthodox approach to the ecumenical movement a clear distinction is made between the unity of the Church – which we confess in the *Creed* – and the unity among Christians; the equality of confessions is also excluded, or rather the Orthodox Church is not a confession, because it is not founded on any confession of faith subsequent to the apostolic age, but is the Church *una, sancta, catholica et apostolica*. Therefore, Orthodox theology cannot be a confessional theology either, but an ecumenical theology, because it has something to transmit to every confession, since it has preserved the entire treasury of the apostolic faith, being the full Church.

The author refers to the *dogmatic content of faith unity*: “In the context of the Ecumenical Movement, centrifugal tendencies with an emphasis on the horizontal, social-political, and cultural, but, above all, in the context of theological pluralism, like other Orthodox theologians, the Romanian dogmatists urgently demanded the answer to the question *what is the dogmatic content of faith unity?*” (page 516). Then he quotes Rev. Prof. Ion Bria who “answers the question of what is the unique dogmatic of Christianity and implicitly the common authority: *the intact original tradition* that Orthodoxy brought back into the horizon of ecumenical expectations to find the definition of the common faith”⁵. Concerning “the methods of Romanian Orthodox Theology in the Ecumenical Movement”, the author explains that Patriarch Justinian Marina made a distinction between “Christian unity” or “unity in diversity”, which represents a broad unity in Christ, especially in terms of serving the world and which can be achieved more quickly, and “unity of the churches”, which represents a distant target; difficult to accomplish due to dogmatic differences. So, a unity of world service can be achieved even if the churches remain distinct in dogma and faith. However, their

⁵ Ion Bria, “Rolul și responsabilitatea Ortodoxiei în dialogul ecumenic,” *Ortodoxia* 32, no. 2 (1980): 375.

union in one Church cannot be achieved without unity in faith and dogmas” (page 577).

In the last part, the author deals with *Romanian Orthodox Dogmatics and Postmodernity: A New Paradigm, A New Generation of Dogmatists; The “Stăniloae” Generations; The Last Traces of Symbolics; The Fading of Ecumenical Interest; The Return of Apologetics: Theology-Science, Theology-Philosophy; Theology-Society*.

Regarding the subchapter “A new generation of Dogmatists”, Rev. Prof. Cristinel Ioja notes very well that “Father Stăniloae dominated the 20th century with the deepening of his theology so that beyond the few references to his theology by those of a generation with him, it stretches like a spider’s web through countless threads in the thinking of all Romanian dogmatists today and not only theirs. Without Stăniloae, Romanian Orthodox dogmatic theology would have looked different. No Romanian dogmatist can articulate Orthodox theology fully and authentically without referencing Father Stăniloae’s thinking. But, at the same time, there is also the risk of building some clichés regarding his thinking and work” (page 591).

The *Return of Apologetics*, after forty years of not being allowed to write on the subject, is evident in the writings of Romanian dogmatists who “positively capitalize on the discoveries of 20th century science, highlighting the relevance of biblical-patristic theology in the new representation of the universe. The cosmos and man are the work of God’s love, present in man and the cosmos. Respect for the mystery of creation, apophaticism, and the paradox of man and the cosmos, the unitary-distinct, paradoxical method specific to patristic thought, constitute benchmarks for the theology-science dialogue in the future, as well” (page 619).

As a general conclusion we have to say that the inestimable value of this book lies in the fact that the author is not only a historian of Orthodox Dogmatics, but is one of the greatest dogmatists of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as is evidenced by the fact that he is co-author of the recent Manual of Orthodox Dogmatics⁶, of the manual of Orthodox Apologetics⁷ and of many books, studies and articles. At the same time, together with Rev. Prof. Ioan Tulcan, he is the founder of *International Association of Orthodox Dogmatists*.

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⁶ *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, volume 1 (Bucharest: Basilica, 2017), volume 2 (Bucharest: Basilica, 2022).

⁷ *Apologetica Ortodoxă*, volume 1 (Bucharest: Basilica, 2013), volume 2 (Bucharest: Basilica, 2014).